

## CONNECTING SCHOOLS TO COMMUNITY TREASURES

### **Patterson Park Public Charter School, Baltimore, Maryland**

Rae Lynn Snyder, like so many dedicated public school teachers, had more than a full time job on her hands when it came to teaching and advising her students in an inner city public school in Baltimore. Still, she wanted to do more. She knew that outside the school's walls lay a treasure trove of cultural resources, community expertise, and experience that could help her students reach their fullest potential. She realized she could facilitate community connections for her students but only if she developed working partnerships. Her job one, she realized, was to educate herself about potential partners. She focused initially on the Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine. As Vince Vaise, Chief of Interpretation at Fort McHenry put it, "Snyder rapidly developed an institutional knowledge of the park that rivaled that of permanent employees."

That was just the beginning. After building administrative support in her school for going beyond the school, she developed partnering relationships with Maryland Historical Society, the Maryland State Department of Education, and Baltimore School for the Arts. Snyder's tireless efforts earned her the nickname "Super Teacher."

One of Snyder's most highly successful collaborative efforts, The Drama of History, was spearheaded with the Education Department at the Maryland Historical Society (MHS) and the Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA). Students research primary source documents at MHS, visit Fort McHenry, and then write, stage and perform an educational play. Plays topics have included the home front during the War of 1812 and the effect of the Emancipation Proclamation on Maryland. In one play, students highlighted the Civil War's Pratt Street Riots in Baltimore. Other plays have focused on influential individuals including Harriet Tubman, Clara Barton, Christian Fleetwood (one of the first African-Americans to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor), the notorious Johns Wilkes Booth, Rebecca Davis, a Confederate sympathizer living in a divided family in Montgomery County, and Ned Rich, a Maryland-born Confederate soldier whose memoir, Comrades Four, tells of his wartime experiences.

### **Lessons Learned**

Rae Lynn Snyder learned that community-based learning initiatives need to be consistent with the values, goals and objectives of the school as well as the partnering institutions. In a true partnership everyone's goals are met. For example Baltimore educators need strong and relevant lesson plans. Lesson plan development needs to be a collaborative process with active partner involvement. When it comes to visiting places like Fort McHenry, teachers need easy access to streamlined reservation systems and free-to-low-cost transportation. Most importantly, teachers need an active and responsive relationship with the community institution.

Partners have needs as well. In the case of the Maryland Historical Society, whose mission is to reach students in every county of the state, with a special emphasis on

the underserved. MHS boasts one of the most comprehensive collections of primary source documents and historical artifacts related to the history of Maryland and the nation. Partnering with a third institution, the Parks for Every Classroom program (PEC), enabled the partners to improve the level of educational programming on-site while reaching more students. PEC could listen to all partners and provide teacher training in place-based educational practice that no solo institutional partner could provide.

Rae Lynne Snyder's efforts landed her a promotion within the Baltimore City School system where she now works as coordinator of community connections in social studies and the humanities. Since her promotion, among other things, she has helped Fort McHenry find the best-fitting school programs and most-focused students. For example, she has helped link school JROTC programs to the Fort. Students enrolled in JROTC now have a richer Revolutionary and Civil War historical context. Snyder has also engaged heads of music departments in city schools to work with Timothy Ertel to populate the Fort's fife and drum corps with young musicians. When it comes to school/community partnerships the Baltimore model shows that the sky is limit...and that it helps to have a super-teacher on call.

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**What's your story? We'd love to share it with others!**



